

Countable Nouns With *a/an* and *some*

A

Countable nouns can be *singular* or *plural*:

a dog	a child	the evening	this party	an umbrella
dogs	some children	the evenings	these parties	two umbrellas

B

Before singular countable nouns you can use *a/an*:

- Good-bye! Have a nice evening.
- Do you need an umbrella?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without *a/the/my*, etc.):

- She never wears a hat. (*not* She never wears hat)
- Be careful of the dog. (*not* Be careful of dog)
- I've got a headache.

C

We use *a/an* . . . to say what kind of thing or person something/somebody is:

- A dog is an animal.
- I'm an optimist.
- Tim's father is a doctor.
- Are you a good driver?
- Jill is a really nice person.
- What a pretty dress!

We say that somebody has a long nose / a nice face / a strong heart, etc.:

- Jack has a long nose. (*not* the long nose)

In sentences like these, we use plural nouns alone (*not* with *some*):

- Dogs are animals.
- Most of my friends are students.
- Jill's parents are really nice people.
- What awful shoes!
- Jack has blue eyes. (*not* the blue eyes)

Remember to use *a/an* when you say what somebody's job is:

- Sandra is a nurse. (*not* Sandra is nurse)
- Would you like to be an English teacher?

D

You can use *some* with plural countable nouns. We use *some* in two ways:

1) *Some* = a number of / a few of / a pair of:

- I've seen **some** good movies recently. (*not* I've seen good movies recently)
- **Some** friends of mine are coming to stay this weekend.
- I need **some** new sunglasses. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Do not use *some* when you are talking about things in general (see also Unit 72):

- I love **bananas**. (*not* some bananas)
- My aunt is a writer. She writes **books**. (*not* some books)

Sometimes you can make sentences with or without *some* (with no difference in meaning):

- There are (**some**) eggs in the refrigerator if you're hungry.

2) *Some* = some, but not all:

- **Some** children learn very quickly. (but not all children)
- **Some** police officers in Britain carry guns, but most of them don't.

Exercises

68.1 What are these things? Try and find out if you don't know.

1. an ant? *It's an insect.*
2. ants and bees? *They're insects.*
3. a cauliflower? _____
4. chess? _____
5. a violin, a trumpet, and a flute? _____
6. a skyscraper? _____
7. Earth, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter? _____
8. a tulip? _____
9. the Rhine, the Nile, and the Mississippi? _____
10. a pigeon, an eagle, and a crow? _____

Who were these people?

11. Beethoven? *He was a composer.*
12. Shakespeare? _____
13. Albert Einstein? _____
14. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and John Kennedy? _____
15. Marilyn Monroe? _____
16. Elvis Presley and John Lennon? _____
17. Van Gogh, Renoir, and Picasso? _____

68.2 Read about what these people do, and then say what their jobs are. Choose one of these jobs:

driving instructor interpreter journalist ~~nurse~~ pilot plumber
travel agent waiter

1. Sarah takes care of patients in the hospital. *She's a nurse.*
2. Robert works in a restaurant. He brings the food to the tables.
He _____.
3. Mary arranges people's trips for them. She _____.
4. Ron works for an airline. He flies airplanes. _____.
5. Linda teaches people how to drive. _____.
6. Dave installs and repairs water pipes. _____.
7. Jenny writes articles for a newspaper. _____.
8. John translates what people are saying from one language into another so that they can understand each other. _____.

68.3 Put in *a/an* or *some* where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty (-).

1. I've seen *some* _____ good movies recently.
2. What's wrong with you? Have you got *a* _____ headache?
3. I know a lot of people. Most of them are _____ students.
4. When I was _____ child, I used to be very shy.
5. Would you like to be _____ actor?
6. Do you collect _____ stamps?
7. What _____ beautiful garden!
8. _____ birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly.
9. I've been walking for three hours. I have _____ sore feet.
10. I don't feel very well this morning. I have _____ sore throat.
11. It's too bad we don't have _____ camera. I'd like to take _____ picture of that house.
12. Those are _____ nice shoes. Where did you get them?
13. You need _____ visa to visit _____ countries, but not all of them.
14. Jane is _____ teacher. Her parents were _____ teachers, too.
15. Do you like going to _____ concerts?
16. I don't believe him. He's _____ liar. He's always telling _____ lies.